United Nations A/52/559/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 March 1998

Original: English

Fifty-second session
Agenda items 100 and 118

Training and Research: United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Joint Inspection Unit

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Training institutions in the United Nations system: programmes and activities" (A/52/559).

98-06537 (E) 170398

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Training institutions in the United Nations system: programmes and activities"

I. Scope of the study

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 51/188 of 16 December 1996, in which the Assembly requested the Joint Inspection Unit, in close cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and relevant United Nations bodies, to prepare a study on the training institution programmes and activities of the United Nations system, and to submit a report thereon for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-second session. The background to the Assembly's adoption of resolution 51/188 was its consideration of the Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "Feasibility study on the relocation of UNITAR to the Turin Centre" (A/51/642).

2. In the fifth paragraph of the executive summary of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, the Inspectors explain that their report focused on training institutions in the United Nations system and not on the internal staff training programmes of the organizations or the training delivered by the organizations as part of their technical cooperation programmes.[1]

3. The Administrative Committee on Coordination notes, however, that there is a fundamental confusion throughout the report between the activities of independent training institutions of the United Nations system, defined in paragraph 22 of the report as "a structurally and identifiably distinct, and separately budgeted entity, established by any United Nations system legislative organ for the promotion of training of staff and/or representatives of the Member States and/or other partners", and training activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, which are an integral part of the human resources function of each organization. Much of the information contained in sections II and V.B of the report refers to internal staff training activities of the organizations rather than to those of the training institutions that were to be the subject of the report. Elsewhere in the report, observations about training institutions are interspersed with those about internal training programmes of organizations; this has tended to blur the distinction between the two very different types of activities and entities and may lead to misunderstandings. Also, the term "training institutions" is used interchangeably to refer to system bodies (e.g., the United Nations Staff College Project, UNITAR and the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions) as well as to the individual training units within organizations.

4. In paragraph 6, the Inspectors highlight some of the obstacles they encountered in preparing the report, in particular the processing of voluminous documentation and soliciting of views of both the participating organizations and the training institutions throughout the system within a very tight time-frame, as well as, in certain cases, the incomplete information that was furnished to them.

5. The question of training – indeed the very definition of training across the common system – is extremely intricate. In order to navigate the breadth and depth of the subject in any orderly fashion, a more concise presentation of the study's scope from the outset would have facilitated organizations' understanding of what inputs were required; the report's shortcomings might also have been overcome if more time had been available to the Inspectors to give full and serious consideration of organizations' comments on the draft report before finalization as a number of underlying assumptions required further clarification and correction. Organizations had gone to considerable effort to comply with a deadline for comments, which was changed at the last minute, only to find that their comments had been disregarded.

II. Conclusions and recommendations

6. The Inspectors identify six problem areas: a widespread absence of coherent training strategies, policies, guidelines and standards at both the agency and the system level; the lack of transparency and visibility of the activities of training institutions; the proliferation of training institutions, programmes and activities; inadequate interaction or coordination among training institutions; the absence of clear and well-defined procedures for the training institutions to report to legislative organs; and the lack of a clear identification of training and research functions.

7. The Administrative Committee on Coordination considers that it would have been appropriate to provide a more detailed analysis of the cost-benefit impact of those conclusions and of the recommendations that derive from

them, or some other form of substantiation of the rationales underlying the recommendations.

8. For its part, the Secretariat has a clear training and staff development strategy, which is aligned with the Secretary-General's reform proposals. In the design, development and management of learning and development programmes for staff, essential linkages between learning and development, performance management and career support are reinforced. The Secretariat continually assesses needs and evaluates programmes to ensure that they support the Organization's strategic objectives, while, at the same time, providing staff with opportunities for individual growth and development. A concerted effort is under way to move from emphasis on training to the broader concept of organizational learning by providing increased opportunities for alternative learning and development activities.

9. This situation is replicated in many organizations of the common system. Indeed, a significant number of organizations have a coherent training strategy that suits the needs of their organization. Moreover, there is broad similarity between those strategies; hence, one common system approach is not considered necessary or desirable, as needs vary from one organization to another given the diversity of their mandates, structures, locales, organizational cultures and funding situations. As indicated in paragraph 11 below, however, the United Nations Staff College Project provides a mechanism for sharing information on training strategies and developing joint programmes in areas of cross-organizational interest. In its resolution 46/191 B of 31 July 1992 on the common system, the General Assembly acknowledged that the United Nations common system should be responsive to the **special needs and concerns** of the participating organizations [emphasis added]. The Administrative Committee on Coordination has increasingly emphasized the need for greater pragmatism and flexibility in the common system in order to improve further the capacity of organizations to fulfil their diverse mandates.

10. Any perceived lack of transparency and visibility of the activities of training institutions should be viewed from the perspective of the institution itself and the respective legislative organ to which it reports; moreover, the so-called "proliferation" of training institutions, programmes and activities should be judged in terms of their diverse mandates, programme goals and target beneficiaries.

11. With regard to potential overlap between two Administrative Committee on Coordination entities, namely the CCPOQ Advisory Panel and the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions Subcommittee on Staff Training, which is mentioned in paragraph 129, it should be noted that the former focused on specific aspects of training related to operational activities, in particular programmes concerning field coordination, whereas the latter was concerned with general aspects of staff training, including, *inter alia*, serving as a forum for staff training specialists of the United Nations system.

Recommendation 1

12. The Administrative Committee on Coordination and its machinery have strongly supported the United Nations Staff College Project, which is viewed as having the potential for performing a valuable synergistic role in the training of staff across the United Nations system, especially in core areas and in the promotion of a common United Nations system culture. The Committee therefore found the thrust of some of the elements of this recommendation interesting and relevant as far as the United Nations Staff College Project was concerned; however, some of the underlying assumptions demand further clarification.

13. The reference to the United Nations Staff College Project in recommendations 1 and 2 of the report, "once its present legal status is modified from its condition as a project", implies that, until such time that this has been changed, it is not a full legal entity and therefore cooperation and collaboration with other training institutions cannot take place. At a time when expectations regarding the Staff College Project are high, greater support and encouragement for this initiative might have been expected. As a project of the United Nations, the Staff College Project has been entrusted to the International Trade Centre/International Labour Organization for implementation and administration.

14. The Administrative Committee on Coordination fully agrees that training programmes should be designed in direct response to the well-defined needs of beneficiary target groups and in full consultation with them, as stated in paragraph 23 of the report. It is for this reason that a too rigid and strict division of labour according to target groups and potential audiences (e.g., Member States for UNITAR; United Nations system staff and non-governmental organizations for the United Nations Staff College Project may not always be effective or efficient and has been recognized in paragraph 46 of the report. Joint training of United Nations system staff, national officials and civil society is being increasingly considered; for example, training programmes of the United Nations Staff College Project often include national, governmental partners and

counterparts, certainly in those programme areas in which such an approach is deemed to be most effective (e.g., development management, peacekeeping and peacemaking, complex emergency management). A more meaningful division of labour might therefore be considered either (a) along themes and subjects for which institutions have proven capacity and demonstrated ability to deliver, or (b) through the pooling of resources and on the basis of collaborative joint ventures.

Recommendation 2

15. In the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, coordination should not be pursued as an end in itself without identification of any real programmatic enhancement or of the increased costs involved. Similarly, proposals for increased centralization and the establishment of more formal coordinating structures and common strategies should be weighed carefully against the objectives of the current drive across the common system for streamlining, decentralization, simplification, delegation and the search for delivery mechanisms that are closer to the "client".

16. In the staff training and development area, the Administrative Committee on Coordination machinery has had some success in coordinating training programmes and development of materials; this work has also been carried out when appropriate and practicable in conjunction with the International Civil Service Commission, such as in the development and promulgation of guidelines for the evaluation of training in 1993. These efforts will continue to be strengthened, but, as stated in paragraph 9 above, the solution is not to force a common training strategy on all common system organizations nor to increase the formal legislation or micro-management of training and development initiatives.

Recommendation 3

17. There is a misconception regarding the Administrative Committee on Coordination's role in the suggestion that it should undertake an evaluation on the use and impact of the activities of the training institutions under the jurisdiction of member organizations and submit this to the respective legislative organs. It is up to those legislative organs to determine the need for and modalities of evaluation of institutions within their jurisdiction, if appropriate within such policy coordination considerations as may be agreed to by the Committee.

Recommendation 4

18. This recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly and the legislative organs of the organizations, which are ultimately responsible for managing their own agendas in the most effective manner. The Administrative Committee on Coordination fully supports initiatives aimed at further strengthening cooperation and coordination among training institutions. The best stimulus to effective coordination and cooperation in the execution of training activities, however, is an institution's demonstrated capacity and ability to deliver cost-effective programmes in areas of mutual interest.

Notes

[1] The comprehensive list of training institutions covered by the report had not been issued at the time of the preparation of the present comments.